# RECENT HISTORIOGRAPHIC AND CONCEPTUAL VIEWS ON DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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**Abstract**

The present paper examines the main approaches of the recent historiography focusing on democratic society and religious pluralism by centring the idea of freedom of religion and the relationship between church and state. The question of how the relationship between state, democratic society and religious pluralism evolved in the last decades has challenged two focuses: (*a*) the models of governance and the societal outcomes and (*b*) the political features and the institutional assessments. Therefore, the current contribution focuses on two objectives: (*1*) to renew attention to the latest conceptual and analytical insights of the recent decades and (*2*) to individualize relevant themes of research describing the relationship between governance, society and religious pluralism. In conclusion, the results and findings of the research of the independences between concepts engaging historical development and governance of religious pluralism.

**Key words:** *society, state, religion, institutions, governance, religious pluralism.*

## Introduction

The question of governance, society and religious pluralism developed in the public sphere emergent subtopics attributed to the policy agenda, social transformation or specific legal provisions. However, despite the increasing debates on the subject, scientific research rarely focused on the conceptual and normative views in the last two decades within the framework of a historiographic analysis. From these conceptual assessments, one of the major pathways that emerged in the last decades points to the relationship between policy directions, decision-making processes and social outcomes setting the discussion in the context of a research debate about governance-rights relationship. In the last two decades, many recent conceptualisations have introduced a functionalised approach to contemporary society pointing to the increasing number of religious expressions focusing on religious norms and visions, state governance, social pluralism, religious beliefs and political participation (Bretherton, 2006: 371-392; Evans, 2014: 145-163; Greenberg, 2000: 377-294).

The assessment of the relationship between the governance of the religious pluralism and society implies also the recent interpretations based primarily on the relationship between state and church and the social links of religious beliefs. Therefore, the current paper discusses a threefold approach: (*i*) the acknowledgement of the detailed discussion of governance and faith relationship (Cavanaugh, 2006: 299-321; Driskell, Embry & Lyon, 2008: 294-314; Beard, Ekelund, Ford, Gaskins & Tollison, 2013: 753-777; Cadge, Griera, Lucken & Michalowski, 2017: 226-233); (*ii*) the latest understanding of how society and religious pluralism evolved in the last

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decades exploring the well-individualized dualities: state and church, religion and society, local and urban, faith engagement and community participation, religious communities and social engagement (Gibelman & Sheldon, 2003: 5-23; Müller, De Graaf & Schmidt, 2014: 739-759; Richardson, 2015: 1-19; Audi & Smith, 2023: 42-51; Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744; Reichenbach, 2010); (*iii*) the complementary perspectives of religious beliefs and civil liberties (Katnik, 2002: 14-38; Bielefeldt, Pinto & Petersen, 2022: 1-12; Tadros: 2022: 96-108; Galla, & Gershevitch, 2011).

The three interpretative frameworks address the social and historical interpretations from the contemporary studies surrounding the governance, state and religious pluralism characteristic features. More specifically, the current research focuses on the latest narratives of the linkages between society, dialogue and religious beliefs.

**Methodology**

However, while the research on the relationship between governance, society and religious pluralism has been evolving, some missing topics from this debate need to be addressed and documented concerning the state and local governance levels. Thus, the research is carried out from the recent scientific literature perspective as the first section adopts the interdisciplinary research and the comparative assessments. Moreover, in the first section of the paper, the state governance and faith relationship is addressed by interrogating a multi-dimensional approach to the interactions between social action, community participation and individual choices.

Tracing the descriptive and analytical framework, the second section of the paper challenges the two lines of analysis of the comprehensive study in terms of the public and private sphere. However, if the first section assesses the descriptive and analytical framework using recent literature published between 2000 and 2023, the second section uses the analysis of the recent sources launched between 2010 and 2023 setting the conceptual categories and values incorporating social, theological and cultural practices. The third section of the research focuses on the normative visions by projecting the analysis of recent sources used to evaluate the nature of the protection of religious beliefs and civil liberties using a qualitative approach to contemporary studies launched in the period 2004-2022.

According to this methodological framework, the research implies an analytical and interpretive approach examining the recent conceptual foundations of the state governance and faith relationship (Section I), the theoretical determinants and the epistemology of the society, dialogue and religious pluralism interactions (Section II) and the qualitative inquiry of the recent scientific advances of the historical and theological realities of religious beliefs and civil liberties (Section III). While the three sections map the links of the theoretical elements with the recent historical analysis, the research also assesses three overlapping reflective stages: (*1*) the approach to the historical roots and narratives of state governance, faith and religious communities (Section I); (*2*) a theoretical and conceptual bridge between society, dialogue and religious pluralism (Section II) and (*3*) a historical and social inquiry of the particular settings of religious beliefs and civil liberties (Section III).

## Section I. Recent historical narratives of state governance and faith

State governance and decision-making processes are important elements of the relationship between church and state (Davis, 2010; Lienesch, 2014). More specifically, the recent scientific literature filled the gap through the linkages between (*a*) the individual and community level; (*b*) the social and administrative systems (Clevenger & Cadge, 2015) and (*c*) the policy patterns, the diplomatic and historical roots in a given context (Damean & Oncescu, 2015; Greenberg, 2000: 377-394; Damean, 2012: 184-192). To take an example, Chapman and Lowndes argue a broader approach for the functional relation between faith groups and urban governance (Chapman & Lowndes, 2008, 57-75). From an analytical point of view, Chapman and Lowndes stimulated in 2008 the discussion of faith and local governance setting the lines for the examination of the policy agenda and faith engagement (Chapman & Lowndes, 2008, 57-75). Moreover, the authors point to a deep-based foundation of social action stipulating (*a*) the role of community participation and engagement; (*b*) the approach to community services and community leadership; (*c*) the engagement of the "faith-based actors" and "faith activists" (Chapman & Lowndes, 2008, 57-75). Much of the research advances in the scientific literature also chart the role of the faith community and the approach to social-based discourse and cohesion assessing the patterns of religious communities and religious discourse in public life (Bretherton, 2006: 371-392).

Furthermore, in the course of the last decades, other authors defined the basis of the state governance standards implying the patterns of the faith and the historical roots of political participation (Driskell, Embry & Lyon, 2008: 294-314). Therefore, Evans mentions that the analytical framework of state governance and faith evolved too giving way to the analytical framework of the relation between religion and decision making processes (Evans, 2014: 145-163; Greenberg, 2000: 377-394).

Correspondingly, two outcomes emerge from this perspective. First, empirically observing, the state governance acknowledges the particular relevance of political engagement and individual attitudes and choices (Campbell, 2004). Consequently, Beard *et al.* establish the linkage between religion and political choice by advocating for the normative content of political behaviour and religious attachment (Beard, Ekelund, Ford, Gaskins, & Tollison, 2013: 753-777). Moreover, Beard *et al.* utilize factor analysis to analytically separate the consequences of political behaviour and the individualized outcomes of social secularism. Furthermore, Djupe & Grant show in 2001 the envisioned dimensions of the relationship between religious institutions and political participation (Djupe & Grant, 2001). Additionally, in 2017, Cadge *et al.* analyzed a large sample of concepts approaching religion and public institutions and examined the historical role of faith and religion (Cadge, Griera, Lucken & Michalowski, 2017: 226-233). Cadge *at al.* also state the normative model of the relationship between religion, spirituality and public institutions shaping a systematic analysis of the jurisdictional and social elements (Cadge, Griera, Lucken & Michalowski, 2017: 226-233).

Nieuwenhuis is particularly focused in 2012 on indicating the establishment values of norms implying the free exercise of faith and democratic commitments. However, the normative framework of the relationship between state and church calls for legitimacy and rule of law regarding three dimensions: social services, cultural

organizations and government policy (Nieuwenhuis, 2012: 153-174). Here, Nieuwenhuis clarifies the relation to the social theory of the democratic societies illustrating the role of religious discourse, religious tolerance and education and raising two important issues: the patterns of a pluralistic society and the place of religion in private and public life (Nieuwenhuis, 2012: 153-174).

Moreover, other guiding perspective of the governance-faith relationship is the status of the state capacity and the legal provisions of religion (Buckley & Mantilla, 2013: 328-348). If approaches to social services and cultural organizations followed the conceptual views of the social theory of democratic societies (Driskell, Embry & Lyon, 2008: 294-314; Bretherton, 2006: 371-392; Chapman & Lowndes, 2008, 57-75), in the study of Buckley and Mantilla (2013: 328–348), the authors argue for a new direction of research and analysis such as the role of development for the religion-state relations (Buckley & Mantilla, 2013: 328-348). Other complementary approaches regard the doctrine aspects and the practice patterns. Specifically, Salomon (2023) notes the approaches to history, political systems and doctrine impacting society, community and different groups. From this perspective, the recent literature also states the role of historical legacies and scientific research by studying four variables: (*a*) the patterns of sovereignty and politics; (*b*) the religious orientation; (*c*) the faith communities; (*d*) the local histories and the narratives of dialogue (Salomon, 2023: 802-805; Billingham & Chaplin, 2020: 279-283). The four clusters of variables individualize the model of Salomon (2023) of the relationship between religion, state, governance, sovereignty and the response to historical and political changes. This type of methodological reasoning is recently used to provide new directions of research of the interactions between cultural changes, community engagement and institutional arrangements. By extending this methodological mapping, the second section of the research enriches the theoretical and historical analysis by reflecting assessments of the scientific research during 2010s and 2020s.

**Section II. Society, dialogue and religious pluralism: considerations for an interpretive research**

The notion of religious pluralism is of central relevance in recent literature prevailing on the conceptual advances of four related approaches: (*a*) religious pluralism and ethics (Audi & Smith, 2023: 42-51) (*b*) religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744); (*c*) religious pluralism and religious liberty (McGraw, 2016); (*d*) ethical encounters and religious studies (Miller, 2022).

In this sense, a dynamic research area of in the relationship between the societal context and religious pluralism is the interreligious dialogue (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744). In the course of the last two decades, the term and related concepts have been questioned as a concept basis for interfaith relations and dialogue. A particular expression approaches the historical background emphasizing "church", "dialogue" and "state" and the role of the ecumenical councils (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744). In fact, the historical and social analysis of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue often seeks to achieve two empirical findings. The first goal is to take into account the correlations between the historical, social, theological and political circumstances and the individual options by revealing the effects of the institutional choices. The second issue often focuses on using the method of the

historical case study and historical examples aimed to develop a structural and theoretic framework to assess the role of the doctrines, community standards, church and institutional choices illustrating the future trajectory of the relationship between church and state (Audi, & Smith, 2023: 42-51; Son, 2023; Mayer, 2023: 389-408; Reichenbach, 2010; Melve, 2015: 213-221).

Based on these findings, other studies engage a second approach setting "society" and social dialogue as necessary conditions of the religious pluralism (Audi, & Smith, 2023: 42-51). A further level of analysis is though multi-approach network including: (*a*) social-based initiatives and the awareness of religious diversity (Son, 2023); (*b*) social cohesion and state actors; (*c*) social governance and the decision-making processes; (*d*) governance model and social integration; (*e*) the legal framework of the church-state separation; (*f*) the role of religious organizations in the public area and the social context (Mayer, 2023: 389-408); (*g*) the religious traditions and religious dialogue (Reichenbach, 2010); (*h*) the role of social movements and the dynamic of religious diversity; (*i*) latest religious institutions, socialization and interreligious dialogue (Müller, De Graaf & Schmidt, 2014: 739-759; Richardson, 2015: 1-19).

Following these approaches, the last two directions, namely the role of religious organizations and the social context, are recurrent approaches pointing for the ecclesiastical reform and the narratives of a new interpretative landscape (Melve, 2015: 213-221). More in this direction, Melve provides two interpretative frames. In the first sequence, the approach to political history and the alternative networks link the social context, ecclesiastical reform, community-based initiative and public discursive developments (Melve, 2015: 213-221). In the second sequence, the demand for the analysis of related concepts and terms namely: "pluralization", "ecclesiastical reform", "social aspects", "power", "public" and "private" identify the guiding principles and values focused to reveal the findings of the society, dialogue, religious pluralism and interreligious relations (Miranda, 2010).

Another master approach is concerned with the institutional history and analytical level by developing a complex outlook on the role of society and dialogue in public debate. Nevertheless, there are further considerations meant to underpin the "religious socialization" and the outcomes of the social and family contexts (Müller, De Graaf & Schmidt, 2014: 739-759). Therefore, a major analytical concern was launched by Christodoulakis in 2021 by discussing two structural approaches to religious dialogue: religious teaching and religious traditions (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744). From this interpretation, the secular framework of the state-society-religious pluralism relationship is marking the cultivation of values and norms in pluralistic societies by associating new semantic concepts such as: "truth", "doctrine", "confession", "religious experience", "human freedom", "human beings", "interfaith dialogue", "social teachings", "values") (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744). At the same time, the prevalence of the concepts of "dialogue" and "culture" indicates the societal and historical significance of religious pluralism connecting the discussion of the emergence of the presence of religious beliefs and religious pluralism in contemporary society (Christodoulakis, 2021: 735-744).

Bowling addresses in 2022 the narratives of religious literacy and interreligious dialogue seeking new contributions to the society, dialogue and religious pluralism relationship (Bowling, 2022: 4-18). Therefore, the emerging debate on religious

pluralism is based on public reasoning, religious traditions and religious studies by identifying the patterns of social, spiritual and cultural life (Bowling, 2022: 4-18). In this direction, Bowling shows the role of social practices and processes approaching tolerance, religious understanding, freedom of expression and interfaith work and development (Bowling, 2022: 4-18). Bowling also explores the consolidation of social values and indicates the guiding principles of the "pluralism orientation" and "religious diversity" (Bowling, 2022: 4-18). Moreover, it focuses on the findings of the "positive attitudes toward religion" demonstrating the particular considerations of the "appreciative knowledge" and "religious literacy competencies" (Bowling, 2022: 4-18).

Drawing on religious pluralism and religious equality, Tadros developed in 2022 a framework for the analysis of religious equality, pluralism, freedom of religion and freedom of belief (Tadros, 2022: 96-108). Thus, the research of society and religious freedom finds new approaches in the public sphere articulating the right to freedom of belief. Therefore, Tadros describes the correlation between religious pluralism, freedom of religion and international development by examining five alternative levels of analysis: (*a*) religious inclusion and assistance; (*b*) government policies and engagement; (*c*) religious actors and policy dialogue; (*d*) the emerging development agenda at various levels; (*e*) community engagement and social cohesion; (*f*) religious affiliation and experiences (Tadros, 2022: 96-108).

In assessing the impact of community engagement and social cohesion, the third section of the paper raise awareness on the interpretive approach to religious beliefs and civil liberties entailing subsequent subtopics: religious faith, right to freedom of religion, freedom of religion, cultural pluralism etc.

## Section III. Religious beliefs and civil liberties: recent normative accounts

The theme of religious beliefs and civil liberties created a complex centrality in the last two decades considering the legal basis for the protection of religious beliefs, but also the social evaluation of religious beliefs and civil liberties. This theme of discussion is centred on three central principles playing a major role in guaranteeing the freedom of thought, religion and expression, such as equity, universality and tolerance (Bielefeldt, Pinto & Petersen, 2022: 1-12). However, Bielefeldt, Pinto & Petersen (2022: 1-12) precisely express the religious faith and human rights addressing the theoretical and practical framework of freedom of religion and human rights ranging from the establishment of the normative patterns to the normative expression of the cultural diversity and freedom of beliefs. At the same level, Bielefeldt *et al.* (2022) explore the multi-dimensional background of the nature of rights raising awareness about the role of individual commitment in the area of religious beliefs, religious practices and civil liberties.

Other interpretations refer to the complex assumptions of the overlaps between interreligious dialogue and religious beliefs building on the position of religious institutions and actors in society and the basis of religious equality (Tadros: 2022: 96-108). Moreover, the idea of religious equality was often associated with social practices and the new dimensions of cultural practices, cultural expression and religion. Thus, Abdulla (2018) demonstrates the complementary between judicial protection and normative visions when advocating for the relationship between

culture and religious practices. More specifically, the first approach explores the framework for understanding the religious beliefs and traditions implying the state-society-religion relationship and referring to a contemporary interpretation of the freedom of expression and the necessary condition and evaluation of "the right to freedom of religion or belief" (Petersen, 2022: 40-48). The discussion of religious beliefs and civil liberties is incomplete without outlining the empirical investigation of the cultural policies and cultural heritage. The second issue approach promotes the role recognition of rights and freedoms taking note of the complex expansion of social and cultural pluralism. Therefore, this expression argues the comprehensive analysis of how the social, cultural and policy topics individualize the domain of cultural policies and cultural heritage. Other impressions shape a further understanding and interpretation of the cultural ideas and religious beliefs (Galla & Gershevitch, 2011) advancing a normative and conceptual matrix of the freedom of religion and belief. This includes the role and activities of the cultural institutions, public discourse, religion and arts (Galla, & Gershevitch, 2011).

For Audi (2020), culture and religion are the keys to investigate the linkages between democratic values and religious convictions as a result of three narratives: democratic governance, ethics of citizenship and individual citizens. According to Audi, the relation between religion and democracy accentuates the need to understand the social background and historical framework ranging from the institutional issues to ethics of religion (Audi, 2020: 5-24). In addition to the five aspects ("democracy", "government", "normative authority", "social norms", "religious liberty" and "equality"), Audi adds the display of two categories of analysis ("governmental policy" and "constructive citizenship") (Audi, 2020: 5-24). Therefore, the new focus of the scientific literature stimulates new directions of research reflected by "nonjudicial governmental contexts" and "reasonable political conception" with a specific emphasis on the perspective of comprehensive theories and doctrines of liberal democracies (Audi, 2020: 5-24).

From this direction, a recent relevant finding is the circumstance of faith and civil liberties. This dialectic approach covers the relations between individual choices, social and democratic context and the emerging arguments of showing a new knowledge of the governance, society, and religious pluralism. Second, this issue transcends the insights argued by Bielefeldt *et al.* (2022) as the new interpretative approach looks beyond the classical units of analysis (e.g. state, citizen, faith etc). Moreover, other authors note that the relationship of religious beliefs to civil liberties relates also to individual choices raising questions about the centrality of religious groups and the centrality of religious beliefs (Stackhouse, 2004: 275-293). Stackhouse envisages that religious beliefs and civil religion require also ample attention of political theology, civil society and "public theology" (Stackhouse, 2004: 275-293). Furthermore, an analogical approach is developed using the criteria of the determination of the "civil religion" (Stackhouse, 2004: 275-293).

Linked to the religious beliefs, civil religion, civil liberties and subsequent concept of the "common life", Stackhouse proposes an explanation of the role of "public theology", civil society and common life. Such an extension basically provides the convergence in social, legal and policy analysis of the religious beliefs approaching the tangible domain of individual liberty and civil liberties. The research outcomes

allow for an in-depth appreciation of the democratic societies pointing to the concepts of "religion", "governmental policy" and "civil society" (Stackhouse, 2004: 275-293). The reason for this analytical and chronological extension facilitates debate and constitutes the basis for further research on religious beliefs and civil liberties.

**Conclusions**

The conclusions of the research allow for the reexamination of the relations between governance, society and religious pluralism and the analysis of the secular views of faith and tradition. Further, the paper develops an analysis of the normative views of religious beliefs and civil liberties sharing the common ground of legal protection and social development (third section of the paper). As emphasized, the historical background is essential for understanding the conceptualization and contextualization of the relation between society, dialogue and religious pluralism. Therefore, the second section of the paper casts dialogue and religious pluralism framing religious freedom and human rights. The first section of the research examines the findings of the analysis of state governance and faith concluding with the discussion of religion, spirituality and individual choices.

The results of the historiographic and conceptual analysis demonstrate that when the research assesses the democratic society and religious pluralism relationship using an analytical framework of related concepts and views, the interrelated results indicate the importance of the multi-level approach to social thinking and historical legacies.

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